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FRANCES ANNETTE BROADWELL. Yeats's Poetry from Early to Late: A Changing View of Man. (1976)
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Yeats began to change radically his poetic style during the decade following 1900. A textual examination of selected examples from Yeats's early and later work will reveal that the stylistic differences which distinguish his early from his later poems are but a reflection of more profound philosophical differences. On the basis of these two changes in style and philosophical direction, Yeats's poems may be divided into two distinct phases.

The fundamental philosophical difference which is responsible for distinguishing Yeats's poetry into two phases is the change from the dualistic interpretation of man's nature implied by his early poems to the monistic one implied by his later poems. The evolution from dualism to monism reflected by Yeats's poems involves a new interpretation of man's experience of the world and of his means of achieving spiritual and aesthetic vision.

Although Yeats's poetry from early to late may be divided into two distinct phases, this is not to say that his poetry does not sustain much continuity throughout. A central concern expressed by all Yeats's poems is the quest for, and the achievement of, spiritual and aesthetic vision; it is the nature and means of attaining this vision which distinguishes between the two phases. All Yeats's poems imply the view that man's experience of the world is characterized by conflict (the conflict is often expressed in terms of the opposition of flesh and spirit, or of vision and action); it is the way this conflict is interpreted which distinguishes between the two phases. And, while all Yeats's poems are

characterized by the use of various personae, it is the kind of personae employed which distinguishes between the two phases.

A Thesis submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School of
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in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

Approved by
John C. Hylton

YEATS'S POETRY FROM EARLY TO LATE:

A CHANGING VIEW OF MAN

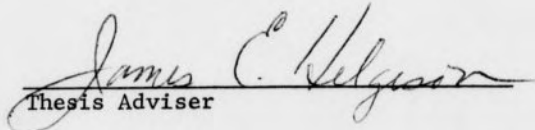
by

Frances Annette Broadwell

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
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APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

All Yeats critics recognize the stylistic changes which distinguish his early poetry from his later poetry, but they differ in the way they evaluate these changes. Richard Ellmann says too much has been made of the differences in Yeats's poetry and not enough of the similarity. Although Ellmann sees that the symbols in Yeats's poetry change substantially from early to late, he sees the later symbols as the "mature equivalents" of the earlier ones.¹ Ellmann sees the differences in Yeats's poetry from early to late as primarily stylistic; his poetry "pivots on the same axis."² J. Hillis Miller expresses the opposing view that the changes in style are a reflection of more profound differences. He sees the later poetry as exhibiting "a crucial reversal in Yeats's theory of art and life, a pivoting which is the basis of his mature work."³

The question which this paper is directed toward answering is: Is the difference between Yeats's early and late poetry primarily a stylistic one, or are the stylistic changes a reflection of more profound differences? A textual analysis of selected examples from the early and

¹In The Identity of Yeats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 151-164, Richard Ellmann discusses his view that the later symbols may be seen to be equivalents for the earlier ones.

²Ibid., p. 84.

³J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 84.

late poems will reveal substantial differences between the views of reality on which the early and later poems are founded. Since Yeats's poems from early to late are written from the perspective of various personae (he hoped to escape abstraction and dogma in his poetry and give his ideas and themes intensity by presenting them as they are experienced in a dramatic situation⁴), attention in this textual analysis will be directed to the personae's assumptions about reality.

In an early poem published in 1893, the persona addresses the rose which represents for him the vision that he seeks:

Come near, that no more blinded by man's fate,
I find under the boughs of love and hate,
In all poor foolish things that live a day,
Eternal Beauty wandering on her way.⁵

(11.9-12)

In a later poem⁶ composed during the years 1931-32, the persona describes his vision in very different terms:

While on the shop and street I gazed
My body of a sudden blazed;
And twenty minutes more or less
It seemed, so great my happiness
That I was blessed and could bless.

(IV. 40-44)

⁴Ellmann, pp. 41-42.

⁵W. B. Yeats, "To the Rose upon the Rood of Time," The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats (hereafter referred to as the Variorum Edition), ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York: Macmillan Company, 1957). Subsequent references to the line of poetry in the text are from this edition.

⁶"Vacillation."

Although both passages describe a spiritual or an aesthetic experience, there are marked stylistic differences between these two passages. The language of the 1932 poem is concrete and colloquial, whereas the language of the 1893 poem is abstract and stylized. The persona of the later poem calls his experience "happiness"; whereas the persona of the earlier poem calls his, "Eternal Beauty wandering on her way." While the setting for the earlier poem is purely symbolic and non-specific, (the persona seeks beauty "under the boughs of love and hate"), the setting for the later poem is both specific and mundane ("while on the shop and street I gazed").

As reflected by the passages quoted above, the early spiritual or aesthetic experience (called "Eternal Beauty" in "To the Rose") involves disengagement from the affairs of the world (from "man's fate" which is blind); whereas the later experience occurs in the midst of worldly activity, and it is felt through the body (the persona says his "body blazed").

In Yeats's early poems the personae's quest for spiritual and aesthetic vision leads to their estrangement from the body and the world; whereas in his later poems the personae's experience of spiritual and aesthetic vision depends upon their involvement with the world and their affirmation of the body.⁷ Hence the view of reality on which

⁷ Many critics see a few of Yeats's later poems--most notably "Byzantium" and "Sailing to Byzantium"--as reflecting a dissatisfaction with mutability and a desire to leave the body in order to reach some immutable world of art and/or truth. But as Anne Kostelanetz, in "Irony in Yeats's Byzantium Poems," Tennessee Studies in Literature IX (1964), 129-41, points out, in the Byzantium poems the persona's obsession with saving his soul by leaving the mutable world is presented ironically as a rationalization for his inability to participate in natural life. The final irony of "Sailing to Byzantium," is that the golden bird into which the old man would be reincarnated and which represents the "artifice of

Yeats's early poems are founded is dualistic; whereas the view of reality on which his later poems are founded transcends this dualism. A textual analysis of the poems referred to above and others will reveal that the differences in style between Yeats's early and later poems are but a reflection of the different understandings of reality on which they are based. Since his view of art always correlates with his view of man, when his understanding of man's nature changed his understanding of art also changed.⁸

Although all Yeats critics recognize the stylistic changes which mark differences between his early and later poetry, there is minor disagreement among them as to when it actually occurs. T. R. Henn says the change in style is usually ascribed to the period during 1910-12 although there are "signs of self-criticism" as far back as 1904.⁹ While Ellmann sees that Yeats's stylistic development "proceeds in waves," he makes a distinction between Yeats's mature and his immature style. Ellmann says the mature style did not develop until after 1900 although there were signs of it earlier. For example, it was after the publication of The

eternity," sings of the mutable, "Of what is past, or passing, or to come" (1.32). Thus these poems, too, share the view of Yeats's later poems that the human imagination is limited by the forms of the world. They, too, show that Yeats had abandoned his attempt to escape from mutability into a world of pure spirit.

⁸My view of the change in Yeats's poetry from early to late is in agreement with J. Hillis Miller's insofar as he sees the differences between the early and late poetry to be founded on a changed understanding of art and life. But my understanding of the view of reality on which the later poems are founded differs from Miller's: He does not see the later view as transcending the early dualism. For Miller's discussion of the change from Yeats's early to late poetry see Miller, pp. 81-84.

⁹T. R. Henn, The Lonely Tower, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen and Co., 1965), p. 107.

Wanderings of Oisín in 1889 that Yeats determined to make ordinary language the basis for his poetry, and he began making revisions of this poem in that light.¹⁰ Roughly the, the period of greatest stylistic change is ascribed to the decade following 1900.

The time during which Yeats's greatest stylistic changes are observed corresponds to a transition period in Yeats's life. Yeats says, in a preface to The Cutting of an Agate (1915), that during the ten years after 1902 he wrote "little verse and no prose that did not arise out of some need of the Irish players."¹¹ He says his preoccupation with the "single art" of the Irish theater (he compares this work to the "shaping of an agate") led him to develop his theoretical understanding of life during this period: "And yet in the shaping of an agate, whether in the cutting, or in the making of the design, one discovers if one has a speculative mind, thoughts that seem important and principles that may be applied to life itself."¹² During the years between 1902-1912, when Yeats was developing his theoretical understanding of life through his work for the Irish theater, he wrote several essays which begin to express a different understanding of art and life from the one expressed by his earlier poems and prose writings. The views expressed by the essays begin to suggest the view of reality and art on which the later poems are founded.

The poems selected for examination as examples of Yeats's early view of reality were all written before 1895, with the exception of Shadowy

¹⁰ Ellmann, p. 119.

¹¹ W. B. Yeats, Preface to The Cutting of an Agate, Essays (New York: Macmillan Company, 1924), p. 271.

¹² Ibid., pp. 273-274.

Waters, which Yeats worked on from 1885 to 1889. Since Yeats continued to make revisions on his poems throughout his life, a poem may so differ from its original version, in some cases, that its distinction as "early" or "late" is made difficult. The two short early poems examined here ("To the Rose upon the Rood of Time" and "Fergus and the Druid") underwent only minor revision, so the use of their final version here presents no problem. However, both long poems to be examined (Shadowy Waters and The Wanderings of Oisín) underwent considerable revision. The first version of Shadowy Waters was published in 1900; it was rewritten and revised and appeared again in 1906. The rewritten version is 188 lines longer than the original and differs in detail although the plot and themes remain the same.¹³ The 1906 version is used here, being by far the clearer one (Yeats made further, but only minor, stylistic revisions to the 1906 version). The Wanderings of Oisín was first published in 1889 although it encountered many later revisions. It was republished in a revised and, to a great extent, a rewritten form in 1895.¹⁴ The final version of Wanderings of Oisín is examined here because its relevance to this discussion of Yeats's early and late poems lies in its position as a transition work from the early to the late poetry.

The two poems selected as examples of the later poetry were written well into Yeats's later period. "Solomon and the Witch" was published in 1918 and "Vacillation" was composed during the years 1931-32 and published in 1932.

¹³See the editors' note on the revised version of the poem; Variorum Edition, p. 220.

¹⁴See Yeats's note on his 1895 revisions of the poem; "Prefaces and Dedications," Variorum Edition, p. 845.

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY PHASE

Yeats always understood that poetry expresses man's highest nature, and when his understanding of man's nature changed, his understanding of what should be the subject matter for poetry changed. As J. Hillis Miller points out, ". . . the process by which the poet receives impulses from the lowest of the nine hierarchies is no different from the process by which he actualizes his true self."¹ Yeats's early view of poetry will be seen to reflect his early view of man, and his later view of poetry, his later view of man.

In an essay published in 1900, Yeats says that art and a man's personal experience belong to two different realms:

We should come to understand that the beryl stone was enchanted by our fathers that it might unfold the pictures in its heart, and not to mirror our own excited faces, or the boughs waving outside the window.²

The truths which art expresses come to "solitary men in moments of poetical contemplation"³ (they come to men who have severed themselves from the affairs of the world). Since action and vision, (which is the substance of art) belong to two separate realms, they depend upon the use of two very different faculties--the will and the imagination. The will

¹J. H. Miller, Poets of Reality (Cambridge: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 74.

²W. B. Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry," Essays (New York: Macmillan Company, 1924), pp. 200-201.

³Ibid., p. 195.

attaches one to the world; whereas the imagination leads one to eternal truth: Yeats says since poetry utilizes the imagination which "neither desires nor hates, because it has done with time, and only wishes to gaze upon some reality, some beauty," then "we would cast out of serious poetry those energetic rhythms as of a man running, which are the invention of the will with its eyes always on something to be done or undone."⁴ Thus poetry, according to Yeats's writing in 1900, is about supra-temporal states of reality, and poets are those who have disengaged themselves from their will and their attachment to the temporal world.

Although the composition date for "To the Rose upon the Rood of Time" (hereafter referred to as "To the Rose") is unknown, it was first published in 1892. "To the Rose" again appeared in Poems (published in 1895) in a section entitled The Rose. In the Preface to Poems, Yeats says he printed the poems in The Rose because he has found there "the only pathway whereon he can hope to see with his own eyes the Eternal Rose of Beauty and of Peace."⁵ Here Yeats explicitly identifies his own "pathway" to vision with the pathway taken by the persona in The Rose section of his Poems.⁶ The dichotomy which Yeats sees between art and experience, or vision and action, in "The Symbolism of Poetry" is assumed by the persona of "To the Rose." It is expressed in this poem as "Eternal Beauty" and "man's fate" (which is blind).

⁴Ibid., p. 201.

⁵W. B. Yeats, Prefaces and Dedications, The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York: Macmillan Company, 1957), pp. 845-846.

⁶"The Rose" was not a title for a separate volume in Poems as it later becomes, but a descriptive heading for certain of the earlier shorter poems. See editors' note to Crossways, Variorum Edition, p. 64.

The persona in this poem is indistinguishable from Yeats as poet since the examples he gives of what he wants to write about come from the two poems which succeed this one in The Rose volume. Since Yeats's explicit identification of himself with the persona of his poem is not customary for him, the identification here suggests that he is making a statement about the general assumptions which will underlie his poetry.

Although the rose represents eternal beauty, it has three characteristics usually associated with mortality: It is a "red Rose," a "proud Rose," and a "sad Rose." The Rose is imbued with these characteristics because it represents eternal beauty as it is perceived by mortal man. The rose is seen to be "upon the Rood of Time" because it represents eternal beauty as experienced by man who is still confined by some of his mortal limits: The persona says it is the "Rose of all my days." In some general notes he added to Poems in 1925, Yeats says that the rose does not represent eternal beauty in itself but as it is perceived by man:

. . . I notice upon reading these poems for the first time for several years that the quality symbolized as The Rose differs from the Intellectual Beauty of Shelley and of Spenser in that I have imagined it as suffering with man and not as something pursued and seen from afar.⁷

Since the rose is a symbol of man's relationship to eternal beauty, it will reflect the pain and pleasure--the emotions--a man feels in perceiving it.

Since the persona sees that to be involved in the world entails blindness; he tells the rose to come near that he may escape blind involvement in the world:

⁷Notes, Variorum Edition, p. 842.

Come near, that no more blinded by man's fate,

I find. . .

.

Eternal beauty wandering on her way.

(11. 10-12)

The persona sees that to attain the vision of the rose requires disengagement from the immediacy of experience: He must choose between relatively uninvolved vision and involved blindness. But the persona does not want the rose to come so near that he transcends all his mortal limits. Although he tells the Rose to "Come near, come near, come near" (l. 13), he also says, "Ah, leave me still / A little space for the rose-breath to fill" (ll. 13-14). This image of being left a little space which is not to be filled with the vision of eternal beauty reflects the persona's understanding that he must accept the limits of human consciousness. Since to be conscious of something implies a knower and a known (a subject and an object), if he is to perceive eternal beauty at all he must remain distinguished from it to some extent. To transcend completely his limits would involve the destruction of his individual self-consciousness, and estrange him from the world and other men. He desires this neither as a man nor as a poet:

lest I no more hear common things that crave;

.

And heavy mortal hopes that toil and pass,

But seek alone to hear the strange things said

By God to the bright hearts of those long dead,

And learn to chaunt a tongue men do not know.

(11. 15-21)

Since it is through the forms of the world that he may perceive eternal beauty ("under the boughs of love and hate / In all poor foolish things that live a day" [ll. 10-11]), it would not be possible for the persona to write poetry or attain vision if he completely disengaged himself from the world. The ideal relationship to the world for one who would achieve vision then, is one which is as uninvolved as possible without being absolutely disengaged. Writing about the past rather than the present is one way the persona will preserve his distance from his personal experience and thereby attain the vision of the rose. He will write about men of the legendary heroic past such as Cuchulain and Fergus rather than about his contemporaries. This intention is in keeping with Yeats's understanding that a man must detach himself from the will to attain vision and to write poetry.

In Yeats's early poetry the two shafts of the cross or "rood" represent the conflict which characterizes man's experience of the world, while the rose often represents the vision of eternal truth and beauty which is possible to those who disengage themselves from the world. Sometimes the rose and cross occur in conjunction with each other as they do in "To the Rose upon the Rood of Time." Richard Ellmann says that the conjunction of the rose and the cross is the central myth of Rosacrucianism of which Yeats was a member in the 'nineties. Ellmann sees that the Rosacrucian interpretation of the rose-cross conjunction applies to its appearance in Yeats's poetry:

In the order, the conjunction is often referred to as a 'mystic marriage,' as the transfiguring ecstasy which occurs when the adept, after the long pain and self-sacrifice of the quest in this world, a world in which opposites are forever quarreling,

finds his cross--the symbol of that struggle and opposition--suddenly blossom with the rose of love, harmony, and beauty.⁸

Ellmann implies that the conflict experienced in life as represented by the cross, sometimes blossoms into a vision of truth or beauty for the personae of Yeats's early poems just as it did for the Rosacrucian adept. But this is not true since the rose blossoms for the personae of Yeats's early poems only to the extent that they have disengaged themselves from the conflict experienced in the world. The rose-cross conjunction, as it occurs in Yeats's early poetry, reflects a dichotomy between involvement in the world and visions of truth and beauty which transcend it.

Like "To the Rose," Shadowy Waters reflects the dualistic view of reality common to Yeats's early poems. In this long dramatic poem, which Yeats originally intended to be a play,⁹ the dualistic view of reality is expressed in terms of the opposition between spiritual and mortal love. Since Yeats worked on the poem from 1885 to 1899 (almost the entire span of his early verse), not surprisingly, it reflects the dualism and themes of the early poems. Forgael's (the persona) original project to leave the world is based on his assumption that spiritual love is not possible to mortal man.

The Shadowy Waters expresses the intensity of Forgael's longing for the perfection and harmony of spiritual love and his corresponding dissatisfaction with the imperfection and disharmony of mortal love. Forgael is a young visionary and poet who is determined to test at all cost his belief that "What the world's million lips are thirsting for / Must be

⁸Richard Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 64.

⁹For Yeats's explanation for its reclassification as a poem, see Notes, in Variorum Edition, p. 815.

substantial somewhere" (ll. 161-62). He expresses the determination most often found in the young to live a life greatly superior to the mediocre ones for which most people settle.¹⁰ Forgael is an archetypal expression of the dreams of youth as yet unsullied by the compromises exacted by life.

The intensity of Forgael's longing for the ideal, for which he has only dreams, is equaled only by the intensity of his scorn for the inferior reality for which most people settle. His dissatisfaction arises entirely from foreseeing, rather than from experiencing, the limits which mortal love imposes. But though Forgael is young and inexperienced, his criticism of the limitation implicit in ordinary reality is acute. He penetrates to the illusory hopes which lead men blindly through life. He says life is:

. . . that old promise-breaker,
The cozening fortune-teller that comes whispering,
'You will have all you have wished for when you have earned
Land for your children or money in a pot.'

(ll. 122-25)

He finds mortal love as illusory as these common-sense goals:

But he that gets their love after the fashion
Loves in brief longing and deceiving hope
And bodily tenderness, and finds that even
The bed of love, that in the imagination
Had seemed to be the giver of all peace,

¹⁰See Ellmann, p. 124, for a discussion of the universals in Keats's poetry.

Is no more than a wine-cup in the tasting.

And as soon finished.

(11. 146-51)

The implication of his comparison of mortal love to wine drinking is that the pleasure involved in mortal love is not essentially different from, because no more satisfying to the spirit than, the more explicitly sensual pleasure of drinking wine. Thus Forgael sees mortal/sensual love and spiritual love as belonging to two mutually exclusive realms of being. He sees that to choose mortal love is to choose against spiritual love. Because of the unfulfillment to the spirit which he foresees to be implicit in mortal love, he seeks to disengage himself from the temporal world. While the persona of "To the Rose" understood that he must maintain some of his ties with time, Forgael wishes to abolish all his ties with the world:

For it is love that I am seeking for,
But of a beautiful, unheard-of-kind
That is not in the world.

(11. 141-43)

Since the love he seeks lies beyond the world, he is also seeking
". . . these waters, / Where I am rid of life--the events of the world"
(11. 120-21). Forgael does not yet understand the necessity for accepting some limit to his ideal, so his willingness to distance himself from the temporal world is carried to the ideal limit--his death. He says:

What matter

If I am going to my death?--for there,
Or somewhere, I shall find the love they have promised.

(11. 207-208)

Forgael, at this point in the poem, differs from the persona of "To the Rose" only in the extreme to which he is willing to go in order to disengage himself from the world. The personae of all the early poems see disengagement as necessitated by the rose quest, but they differ from Forgael in seeing that it must not be absolute.

Forgael's longing for an ideal which exists outside of time entails a hatred of life. He locates the source of man's wretchedness in the material world:

All would be well
 Could we but give us wholly to the dreams,
 And get into their world that to the sense
 Is shadow, and not linger wretchedly
 Among substantial things.

(11. 178-81)

Although the quests of most of the other personae involve a more limited rejection of the world than Forgael's, their quests, too, imply a scorn for life. They differ from Forgael, not in their love of life, but in their understanding of it. (The persona of "To the Rose" sees that his vision of eternal beauty must come from "all poor foolish things that live a day.")

Forgael is displeased when the circling of the birds, who are his self-acknowledged guides to spiritual love, indicate that his ideal lies in Dectora, a mortal woman. He scornfully asks her:

Why do you cast a shadow?

.

They would not send me one that casts a shadow.

(11. 284-85)

Since Forgael's expressed desire has been for a disembodied ecstasy, his acceptance of a mortal love reflects a modification of his original ideal. Forgael, like the personae of the other early poems, comes to accept some of the limits imposed by his mortality. Before he meets Dectora, he tells Abric of his aspirations for an immortal lover:

I shall find a woman,
One of the Ever-living, as I think--
One of the Laughing People--and she and I
Shall light upon a place in the world's core,
Where passion grows to be a changeless thing.

(11. 209-13)

In the end, the kind of immortality which Forgael sees Dectora and himself as achieving is also modified:

Beloved . . .
. . . we grow immortal;
And that old harp awakens of itself
To cry aloud to the grey birds and, and dreams,
That have had dreams for father, live in us.

(11. 615-619)

They grow immortal through their spiritual union, not because they become changeless and will live forever, as Forgael once thought, but because they are actually living the archetypal dreams of their race ("and dreams / That have had dreams for father, live in us"). It is the content of their lives which is immortal rather than they themselves.

But Forgael's acceptance of some of his mortal limits does not entail his affirmation of the world. He still sees his union with Dectora as requiring a disengagement from the world of other men. As

Forgael cuts his ship's tie with the ship of the other men, Dectora says:

The sword is in the rope--

The rope's in two--it falls into the sea,
It whirls into the foam. O ancient worm,
Dragon that loved the world and held us to it,
You are broken, you are broken. The world drifts away,
And I am left alone with my beloved.

(11. 596-600)

Forgael, the young visionary, is juxtaposed to Abric, the middle-aged realist. The opposition of their characters expresses the mutually exclusive life choices of blind involvement and uninvolved vision found in so many of the early poems. Abric sees Forgael's dreams from the perspective of common sense: They are fantasies, illusions which if pursued will mean his ruin. Abric counsels Forgael about the appropriate attitude for lovers to take:

When they have twenty years; in middle life
They take a kiss for what a kiss is worth,
And let the dream go by.

(11. 156-58)

Abric appreciates and accepts what is, but "what is" is all that he can see. He can imagine no higher life for a man than the one implied by the common sense interpretation of reality. "A kiss" is worth its literal sensual import: Abric is blind to the imaginative sphere. For Forgael, what can be dreamed is more real than substantial things, and the fact that he has dreams constitutes proof for him that they refer to a higher, though non-substantial, sphere:

It's not a dream,
 But the reality that makes our passion
 As a lamp shadow--no--no lamp, the sun.

(11. 159-62)

Forgael is captain of the ship and Abric has been his subordinate for many years. Forgae's choice of direction for his ship--beyond the world--is not his crew's choice, and they plan to mutiny and kill him. Though Abric is in sympathy with the common sense orientation of the crew, he refuses to acquiesce to their plans to kill Forgae. Forgae questions Abric as to the reason for his refusal to acquiesce in the plans of the crew. Abric's rather lame account of his loyalty to Forgae is past precedent: "I have called you master / Too many years to lift a hand against you" (l. 111). Although Abric is stronger physically and is unsympathetic with the ends of Forgae, he has been the servant of Forgae for many years; thus the strong realist is a servant of the weak visionary. The fact that Abric does not understand the reason for his loyalty to Forgae only underlines the dichotomy between blind action and uninvolved vision which their characters respectively express.

In his early prose writings Yeats says the strong, active man ultimately depends on the weak visionary:

It is indeed only those things which seem useless or very feeble that have any power, and all those things that seem useful or strong, armies, moving wheels, modes of architecture, modes of government, speculations of reason, would have been a little different if some mind long ago had not given itself to some emotion, as a woman gives herself to her lover, and shaped sounds or colours or forms, or all of these into a musical relation, that their emotion might live in other minds.¹¹

¹¹"The Symbolism of Poetry," *Essays*, pp. 192-94.

Forgael is a poet as well as visionary; Yeats's personae are often poets since art is the way visions from beyond the world are communicated to other men.

As in the previous poems examined, "Fergus and the Druid" implies a dualistic view of reality, but unlike the previous poems "Fergus and the Druid" emphasizes the sorrow and limitation which are entailed by man's choosing to concentrate on either aspect of reality--the eternal or the temporal. Although the composition date for "Fergus and the Druid" is not known, it first appeared in the National Observer, May 21, 1892. Like "To the Rose," it remains essentially unchanged from its original version. Fergus is unhappy when he achieves vision because he loses his vital attachment to the world; and he is unhappy when he is successfully involved in the world because he has then become blind to its spiritual significance. Fergus's life illustrates the inherent unfulfillment of a man's life when his nature is viewed dualistically. No matter how heroic his effort man can never achieve fulfillment since choosing to pursue one aspect of his nature entails repressing the other.

Fergus is at first a highly successful man of action: He is "king of the proud Red / Branch kings" (l. 15). While experiencing the height of worldly achievement, though, he becomes dissatisfied with the limitation he experiences therein. He then gives up his worldly position to seek "dreaming wisdom." But when he attains it, he finds that wisdom entails another kind of sorrow. As in "To the Rose," man's choice is seen to lie between blind involvement and relatively uninvolved vision. Fergus tells the Druid that he gave up his crown to someone to whom kingship was easy, for it has become a "sorrowful burden" to him. He now

seeks help from the Druid because he cannot rid himself of the pride and responsibility that keep him attached to the affairs of the world:

A king and proud! And that is my despair.

I feast amid my people on the hill,

.

And still I feel the crown upon my head.

(11. 16-20)

Fergus's world-weariness is not due to his lack of experience and success in the world, but to his having experienced what the world has to offer and to his having found out its limitations. He tells the Druid that he now sees a king is but a vassal to another type of man:

A king is but a foolish labourer

Who wastes his blood to be another's dream.

(11. 27-28)

Fergus's understanding that a king is a vassal reflects Yeats's understanding that the reality of the world is determined by those with vision. Through being a king, Fergus has come to understand that even a king's activities are but a reflection on the vision of contemplative men; therefore, he wants to break through to the higher life where he now sees the real kingship lies. Since action presupposes principles, even the most successful man is but a servant of those who dream the dream upon which he acts.

The Druid represents man's potential for spiritual fulfillment as does the rose in "To the Rose." The Druid's bodily form reveals the tenuousness of the attachment to the world on the part of a man who would attain vision. He has the shape of a man, but what is most notable about him is his other-worldliness; his body lacks vitality and he is uninvolved

in the affairs of the world. He points out to Fergus his detachment from the world:

Look on my thin grey hair and hollow cheeks
And on these hands that may not lift the sword,
This body trembling like a wind-blown reed.
No woman's loved me, no man sought my help.

(11. 23-26)

The Druid grants Fergus's request for "dreaming wisdom." He gives Fergus a bag of dreams and says, "they will wrap you round" (1. 30). This metaphor for the attainment of wisdom reflects the isolating effect wisdom has on a man. When Fergus attains "dreaming wisdom" he finds that it entails its own appropriate suffering just as did kingship. He says:

I see my life go drifting like a river
From change to change: I have been many things--
A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light
Upon a sword, a fir-tree on a hill
An old slave grinding at a heavy quern,
A king sitting upon a chair of gold--
And all these things were wonderful and great;
But now I have grown nothing, knowing all.

(11. 31-38)

Fergus finally comes to see life from a more cosmic perspective: He attains "dreaming wisdom." He can now see himself as having been a part of many forms of life. But with his transcendence of his mortal limits he now no longer feels himself distinct from other living and non-living things. Fergus has transcended the illusion of his identity, but this involves the loss of his attachment to the world and to other men. From

his cosmic perspective, Fergus can see beauty in all things, including his own lives; but he is no longer a part of the beauty he observes: "But now I have grown nothing, knowing all." The illusion that one has an identity, that he is distinct from all other things, is necessary to action--to doing one thing rather than another. Fergus poignantly experiences what the persona of "To the Rose" foresees: To attain a vision of the eternal beauty in the world entails one's personal disengagement from it. Fergus's characterization of the vision which he seeks as "dreaming wisdom" is appropriate since it is comparable to knowledge which comes to one in dreams when he has lost his individual self-consciousness.

Fergus finally sees the sorrow and limitation implicit in wisdom as well as in kingship:

Ah! Druid, Druid, how great webs of sorrow
Lay hidden in the small slate-coloured thing!

(11. 39-40)

Fergus longs for involvement when he attains vision just as he longed for vision when he was involved in the world. The sorrow and limitation which Fergus experiences with the realization of either his spiritual or his physical possibilities arises from the necessity for denying the other, since man is a being constituted by both realities.

Like "Fergus and the Druid," The Wanderings of Oisín primarily deals with the dissatisfaction which arises from man's choosing to try to fulfill himself either spiritually or materially. J. Hillis Miller sees Oisín as a typical character in Yeats's early poetry because his "adventures are a perpetually renewed quest for a goal that can never be

reached."¹² Miller attributes the personae's dissatisfaction in the early poems to their failure to achieve their quest. He sees the early poems as implying that a transition to another state of reality is about to occur although it is never quite effected: "The characteristic situation of the early poems and plays involves someone who has a bewitching glimpse of the land of heart's desire and is about to be absorbed into it."¹³ But in some cases the personae of Yeats's early poems do achieve the land of the heart's desire. Fergus achieves "dreaming wisdom" but he remains dissatisfied because it entails losing his vital connections with the world. Oisín literally goes to the land of the heart's desire but he remains dissatisfied. Like Fergus, his dissatisfaction arises from the necessity of denying the flesh to fulfill the spirit. Thus the dissatisfaction experienced by the personae of Yeats's early poems is not due to their never having achieved their spiritual quest but to its denial of one aspect of their being: Their dissatisfaction arises from the dualistic nature of reality.

While Oisín does not transcend his dualistic view of reality--he never finds a way to integrate his longing for the immortal with his longing for the mortal--the self-knowledge he gains as a result of his wanderings leads him to reject the quest for the eternal in which the personae of Yeats's early poems engage themselves. Oisín sees that since the quest is based on a denial of man's physical nature it can never lead to fulfillment but only to further dissatisfaction. The Wanderings of Oisín (hereafter referred to as Wanderings) can be seen as a transition work from the early to the late poetry, not because it offers a positive

¹²Miller, p. 78.

¹³Miller, p. 77.

alternative to Yeats's early view of reality, because it does not, but because it shows the dualistic view of reality on which the early poetry is founded to be bankrupt.

While Forgael is dissatisfied with the limits mortality imposes, Oisín become dissatisfied with the limits immortality imposes. Most of this poem is devoted to depicting Oisín's wanderings among the islands of the "everliving" and his failure to find fulfillment there. Oisín is depicted as telling the tale of his wanderings to Saint Patrick who occasionally comments on Oisín's sinfulness and tries to convert him to Christianity. A secondary theme running through the poem is the contrast between Christian and pagan Ireland reflected through their dialogue.

The three islands to which Oisín goes are more than a symbolic representation of life on earth;¹⁴ they represent the best moments of heroic mortal life purged of the limits which time ordinarily imposes on them. The three islands represent the eternalization of perfect love, victorious battle, and repose (they are called the "Island of Dancing," the "Island of Victories," and the "Island of Forgetfulness"). If the experience of eternity is actually to be described, understandably, the description will have to rely on aspects of life on earth for its substance. Since Oisín is heir to a king in an age of heroes, the eternity he experiences consists of the peak moments of heroic life.

At a low point, when the Fenians are thinking of the heroes they have lost in battle, Oisín chooses to go away with Niamh to the islands

¹⁴Many critics see the islands as simply a symbolic representation of life on earth. See Ellmann, p. 19, for this interpretation of the three islands. This interpretation leads Ellmann to see an inconsistency in Oisín's nostalgia for mortal life when that is the life which the three islands represent.

where she promises he will be free of such sorrow and limitation. As they ride to the "Island of Dancing," Oisín sees a vision which comes to symbolically reflect the self-knowledge he eventually gains as a result of his wanderings:

We galloped; now a hornless deer
 Passed by us, chased by a phantom hound
 All pearly white, save one red ear;
 And now a lady rode like the wind
 With an apple of gold in her tossing hand;
 And a beautiful young man followed behind
 With quenchless gaze and fluttering hair.

(I. 139-45)

Oisín questions Niamh about the phantom pairs, but she puts him off. She indicates by her gestures (she "sighs" and "bows her head") that their meaning is a sad one from which she would protect Oisín. After arriving at the first island, Niamh bids the lords and ladies there to take them to Aengus, king of the island. On their way, Oisín is given a harp to play and the immortals dance and sing. Oisín sings of human joy, but, paradoxically, all become sorrowful. They throw Oisín's harp away and say:

'O saddest harp in all the world,
 Sleep there till the moon and the stars die!'

(I. 245-46)

They come to Aengus who is forever young, like all the immortals, and like love itself, whose "first blushes" never die. Aengus makes a speech about human joy, which he too finds sad because he sees it as the cause and perpetrator of the world. He says:

Joy drowns the twilight in the dew,
 And fills with stars night's purple cup,

 And rolls along the unwieldy sun,
 And makes the little planets run:
 And if joy were not on earth,
 There were an end of change and birth,
 And Earth and Heaven and Hell would die,
 And in some gloomy barrow lie
 Folded like a frozen fly.

(I. 261-70)

Aengus says joy is the mainspring of the world since it motivates change and birth. Since joy is responsible for change and birth, it is also responsible for restrictions such as labor, sorrow and death. Joy is responsible for the creation of the world, so Aengus identifies it with God: "'For joy is God and God is joy'" (I. 286). Aengus contrasts man's enslavement to God and joy to the freedom of the immortals who are not ruled by their laws:

But here there is no law nor rule,
 Nor have hands held a weary tool;
 And here there is nor Change nor Death,
 But only kind and merry breath.

(I. 282-85)

Aengus points out that men fear the "grey wandering osprey sorrow" because, being slaves to joy and God, what happens to them is out of their control. Since God and joy are seen to be responsible for time, which is, in turn, responsible for fear and sorrow, the immortals sing that God and joy are

wicked; they desire the end of God's creation and of evil. Aengus counsels the immortals to mock such a scheme, to scorn evil and God's creations:

Then mock at Death and Time with glances
And wavering arms and wandering dances.

(I. 274-75)

"Wandering" and "wavering" are predominate motifs used to describe the activities of the immortals on the first island. These motifs reflect the self-sufficiency of their activities, so they are appropriate ways to mock death and time which are responsible for man's lack of self-sufficiency. The immortals' activities have no purpose or direction because purpose and direction imply desire and striving for something; they imply limitation and change. If there is no purpose to fulfill, then there is no direction in which to change since time does not exist. The dance itself is symbolic of their freedom and immortality since it is an in-itself activity--its raison d'etre lies in its own being.

The immortals compare the stars' enslavement to God's scheme to "bubbles in a frozen pond" (I. 336), and Aengus also compares the end of the world to the frozen state (it will be "folded like a frozen fly"). The landscape where the immortals live is also compared to a frozen state (Oisín compares the song birds who contemplate themselves in the water to "Drops of frozen rainbow light" [I. 183]). It is ironic that being "frozen" is associated both with the existence of time and with the end of it (namely, with the end of the world and with the immortals' island). The contrast which Aengus and the immortals make between the freedom implicit in eternity and the enslavement implicit in time is undercut by the use of the same metaphor to describe both. It is also noteworthy

that the immortals characterize their freedom as "lonely" in contrasting it to the enslavement of the stars who are "bound to their brothers." The implication is that, while there is not satisfaction for man on earth, eternity does not offer a better alternative.

Despite the self-sufficiency of his life with the immortals, Oisín longs for the world. He finds a staff of wood in the ocean with stains of war upon it, and he weeps:

Remembering how the Fenians stept
Along the blood-bedabbled plains,
Equal to good or grievous chance.

(I. 370-72)

Thus Oisín becomes nostalgic for conflict after one hundred years of harmony. Since he has become nostalgic for the conflict and victories of the heroic life on the "Island of Dancing," Niamh takes him to the "Island of Victories" where he may fight and win eternally. Here his experience of battle and conquest will be purged of loss and sorrow just as was his experience of love, song, and dancing on the first island.

As they ride to the "Island of Victories," Oisín once more sees the hound pursuing the deer, and the man pursuing the lady with the golden apple. Oisín again questions Niamh on the meaning of the phantom pairs, and this time Niamh not only tells him to "gaze no more" on them, but also sings a song to distract him from his questions about their meaning. Since her song is about "faery and man / Before God was or my old line began" (i.e., about life before mortal man existed), the suggestion is that the meaning which Niamh would conceal from Oisín regards his mortality. That Niamh breaks off from her song in order to cry suggests that she has no real power to control the reality from which she would protect him.

Once upon the island they are confronted with a speech by a chained lady. She has "soft eyes like funeral tapers" and "a sad mouth, that fear made tremulous" (II. 69-71), and she is chained to two old eagles. These qualities--death, sadness, fear, and servitude--are the ones which Aengus and the immortals have associated with mortality. The chained lady is the antithesis of the immortals who are free from time and its accompanying servitude. Her speech about her brothers whose activities are determined by the time of day further associates her with mortality. The chained lady clearly represents man oppressed by mortality, and her captor turns out to represent mortality itself. Niamh tells the lady that she brings deliverance, but the lady says deliverance is impossible because her enemy is insurmountable. Oisín vows to kill her captor and breaks the chains which bind her to the eagles as a sign of his intention to free her. But his breaking the chains is ironic since it foreshadows his failure rather than his intended success: The eagles are "still earless, nerveless, blind" (II. 100) and have no reaction to their broken chains. Oisín's effort to free the chained lady represents his attempt to deliver himself from the bonds of mortality which, so far, has made him dissatisfied with both immortality and life with Niamh.

The captive lady gives Oisín the sword of Manannan, the sea god who built the castle there for the mighty of the earth (these mighty are now only shades which look down on Oisín "with leisured gaze" which is "loaded with the memory of days / Buried and mighty" [II. 149-50]). Oisín meets the captor-demon who is "dry as a withered sedge" (II. 158). They fight from dawn until evening when Oisín throws him into the sea according to his promise. They then feast and sing and sleep, which is all appropriate to a heroic victory. But on the fourth day, the demon

returns "dull and unsubduable" (II. 217). Oisín wars one day and feasts three days on this island for a hundred years. During this period, he says there were "nor dreams nor fears, / Nor langour nor fatigue" (II. 222-23). This is true because the activities here, like those on the "Island of Dancing," are self-sufficient: Since there is no purpose to fulfill, there is no real strife. The battling and feasting are rituals done in and for themselves, so they involve no fear or fatigue as would real battling and feasting.

After one hundred years, a beech bough comes up from the sea and Oisín remembers how he stood by Finn (his father) under a beech tree at Almuin and heard the outcry of bats. After one hundred years on the "Island of Victories," Oisín becomes nostalgic for the peace possible in the world, just as he became nostalgic for battle on the "Island of Dancing." As he and Niamh leave the island, they hear the demon's song of victory and defeat:

'I hear my soul drop down into decay,
And Mannanan's dark tower, stone after stone,
Gather sea slime and fall the seaward way,
And the moon goad the waters night and day,
That all be overthrown.'

'But till the moon has taken all, I wage
War on the mightiest man under the skies,
And they have fallen or fled, age after age,
Light is man's love, and lighter is man's rage;
His purpose drifts and dies.'

(II. 235-44)

Here the demon is clearly seen to represent mortality: His "soul" decays as the world decays. But until the world does end (until "'all be overthrown'"), he will triumph over even the mightiest of men just as he has triumphed over Oisín and over the ancient heroes for whom the castle (which he has overtaken) was originally built. The demon says the means of his conquest over men is in their own nature: "'His purpose drifts and dies.'" Man is subject to, and eventually conquered by, the laws of mortality as Aengus foresaw.

Niamh tells Oisín that they must go to the "Island of Forgetfulness" because "'The Islands of Dancing and of Victories / Are empty of all power'" (II. 247-48). The third island is the setting for Niamh's final attempt to deliver Oisín from his bondage to mortality. Oisín asks Niamh, as they go to the third island, "'And which of these is the Island of Content?'" (II. 249). Niamh answers: "'None know" and "on my bosom laid her weeping head" (II. 250). This is the third time Niamh has shown sadness in response to Oisín's questioning. The first two times occurred during the journeys to the first two islands when he questioned her about the meaning of the phantom pairs. The pattern of Oisín's questioning and of Niamh's response, which occurs for the third time on the way to the third island, suggests that Oisín has discovered the meaning of the phantom pairs from which she would have protected him. The implicit answer to his question about the "Island of Content" and the meaning of the phantom pairs is that there is no contentment for mortal man. In a note to another poem which also uses the hound and deer images (the hound and deer are one of the phantom pairs), Yeats explains their meaning and applies his explanation to their appearance in Wanderings: "This hound and this deer seem plain images of the desire of the man 'which is for

the woman,' and 'the desire of the woman which is for the man,' and of all desires that are as these. I have read them in this way in The Wanderings of Oisín. . . ."¹⁵ As Yeats suggests, the phantom pairs are images of unfulfillable desires. Oisín later understands their full import when he realizes that to seek eternal fulfillment, as he did on the island, is an impossible goal, for it is man's nature never to rest satisfied with anything.

When they come to the "Island of Forgetfulness," the king of the slumbering folk there, shakes the bell branch and Oisín and Niamh experience a deep sleep. Oisín says he loses "the memories of the whole of my sorrow and the memories of the whole of my mirth" (III. 71). Although Oisín loses his ego-consciousness, he does not lose his connection with mortality as Niamh had hoped; in his dreams, he relives the history of the human race. He lives among those who were simply "winter's tales" to him in life. Oisín awakes after a hundred years to find that a starling has fallen on him. The starling evokes a memory of the Fenians, and once again he becomes nostalgic for mortal life. He tells Niamh he must return to the earth for even the meanest of the Fenians would be sweet to him now: "'Ah, sweet to me now were even bald Conan's slanderous tongue'" (III. 116). Oisín now has a nostalgia for mortality in itself rather than for one of its heroic aspects: He has an unappeasable longing for earth. As he leaves, Niamh asks rhetorically: "'Oh, flaming lion of the world, O when will you turn to your rest?'" (III. 136). The implicit answer is, of course, "never" precisely because he is "of the world."

¹⁵ Notes, Variorum Edition, p. 807.

Oisín cries for joy when he returns to the earth until he sees an old man deprived by age of the things in life he cared about, and then he cries for sadness: because he realizes that the Fenians have died. His crying for sadness after he cries for joy reflects Aengus's understanding that all sorrow arises from joy. Oisín's three hundred years come upon him as he touches earth, and he becomes as weak an old man as he was a strong young one.

Upon his return to Ireland three hundred years later, Oisín finds a new breed of men and a new way of life has replaced the heroic one. He looks with scorn upon "a small and feeble populace stooping with mattock and spade" (III. 164). Their small regard for their bodies and for mortal life is reflected by their physical and moral weakness. Oisín sees that Christianity involves taking the path of self-denial and servitude as the means of achieving eventual immortality. Being from the heroic age, Oisín is constitutionally opposed to this path of weakness (during the course of the narration of his tale to Patrick, he frequently compares the weakness of the Christian man to the strength of the heroic man). But Oisín does not absolutely reject Christianity until he realizes he is also constitutionally opposed to the goal toward which the Christian path is directed. He decides absolutely against Christianity when he realizes that since he left Niamh and each of the islands because he was dissatisfied with eternity, he could find no fulfillment in heaven either:

It were sad to gaze on the blessed and no man
I loved of old there;

I throw down the chain of small stones! When
life in my body has ceased,

I will go to Caolite, and Conan, and Bran,
Sceolan, Lomair,

And dwell in the house of the Fenians, be
they in flames or at feast.

(III. 221-224)

Although Ellmann sees the contrast between Christian and pagan Ireland as irrelevant to the tale,¹⁶ Oisín's dialogue with Saint Patrick relates to his experience in the islands in that both Christians and the "ever-living" share similar views of reality: They both see that all man's unhappiness arises from his mortality, and that man's only fulfillment lies in escaping it. When Oisín clearly understands the reason for his dissatisfaction on the islands is implicit in immortality itself, he rejects Christianity because it is another, though inferior, path to immortality.

Oisín's penetration of the meaning of the phantom pairs yields the self-knowledge that man's nature is to be perpetually in pursuit of his ideal rather than perpetually to experience its realization. When he realizes that his mortality is inescapable, he rejects the quest that would estrange him from it. He rejects his original project for immortality as reflected by his wanderings on the islands, and affirms the ties with mortality from which he originally tried to escape.

Although Oisín does not express any view of mortality that is different from Aengus's gloomy view of it, and in fact he implies that it is his own view, Oisín affirms his mortality because he learns that for one to deny it leads only to further dissatisfaction. Oisín experiences the servitude to time which Aengus has foreseen to be the cruel implication of joy when his three hundred years come upon him:

Ah me! To be shaken with coughing and broken
with old age and pain,

¹⁶Ellmann, pp. 19-20.

Without laughter, a show unto children, alone
with remembrance and fear;

.
All emptied of purple hours as a beggar's cloak
in the rain.

(III. 217-19)

Oisín affirms the mortality he originally rejected, not because he sees in mortality new possibilities for fulfillment which he had overlooked before, but because his experience of the only other choice he sees open to man (the quest for immortality) has shown it to be by far the inferior one. The quest for immortality not only entails dissatisfaction because it is an unfulfillable goal, but also because it entails estrangement from man's vital connection with the world. Oisín's affirmation of man's mortality offers no positive vision of man's possibilities for fulfillment with which to replace the one he rejects. Oisín's understanding of reality remains dualistic: Although he rejects the quest for immortality because it leads to the denial of man's mortal nature, his affirmation of man's mortal nature leads to his denial of man's spiritual nature. He simply reverses the way the personae of Yeats's early poems regard the two aspects of man's being. What the personae of Yeats's early poems affirm (spirit) he rejects, and what they reject he affirms (flesh).

Oisín's understanding that man can find fulfillment neither on earth nor in eternity makes Wanderings a logical transitional work from the early to the later poems. The dualistic view assumed by the personae of the early poems, which entails seeing that the attempt to fulfill one aspect of man's nature entails denying the other aspect, is fully depicted in this poem as the dead end view of reality which it (actually) is. Yeats can only move away from the dualistic view of reality which entails man's dissatisfaction and unfulfillment, no matter his choice.

CHAPTER III

THE LATER PHASE

In an essay written in 1906 (during the period in which he was working with the Irish theater) Yeats comments on his early understanding of poetry:

Without knowing it, I had come to care for nothing but impersonal beauty. I had set out on life with the thought of putting my very self into poetry and had understood this as a representation of my own visions and an attempt to cut away the non-essential, but as I imagined the visions outside myself, my imagination became full of decorative landscape and still life.¹

Yeats now sees his early poetry as founded on a wrong understanding of man's nature. Man's real self does not lie in a realm outside his experience of the world, and therefore art should not divorce itself from personality as Yeats once thought. Yeats gains a new insight into man's nature: "Then one day I understood quite suddenly, as the way is, that I was seeking something unchanging and unmixed and always outside myself . . . and that I myself was the fleeting thing that held out its hand."² Man's real nature lies in and of the temporal world, the realm of action and desire. Yeats says his new insight into man's nature resulted in a new understanding of poetry:

The more I tried to make my art deliberately beautiful the more did I follow the opposite of myself, for deliberate beauty is like a woman always desiring a man's desire. Presently I found that I entered into myself and pictured myself and not some

¹W. B. Yeats, "Discoveries," Essays (New York: Macmillan Company, 1924), p. 336.

²Ibid.

essence when I was not seeking beauty at all, but merely to lighten the mind of some burden of love or bitterness thrown upon it by the events of life.³

Yeats now sees that art is to be about life. It should not be about impersonal disembodied beauty, but about the experiences of real men set in real places. Yeats began to use his own experiences as subjects for his poetry and to cast the personae of his poems in the present rather than the ancient past as he had done in earlier poems.

Yeats's new understanding that art and man's fulfillment arise out of and depend upon a vital attachment to the world does not reflect a rejection of his quest for spiritual fulfillment but simply his understanding that there is another more satisfactory way to achieve it, namely, through engagement with the world. As Ellmann points out, Yeats's new orientation to depict the personal did not mean that he lost his concern for the universal and archetypal:

The poetry he least desired remained a poetry where momentary emotions would over-bubble; but he now felt that poetry might be personal if the self expressed by the poet was the most perfect distillation of himself that he could command. The persona of Yeats's verse of the 'nineties had often moved outside space and time, an eternal lover or an aspiring soul; the new distilled being would be anchored in his own age and country, and clearly identified with Yeats.⁴

For Yeats the depiction of universal truths in a work of art no longer involves a description of disembodied states of being, rather it involves the experience of the whole man.

"Solomon and the Witch" is a poem about a spiritual experience which is both momentary and sensory. Two lovers (Solomon and Sheba) achieve a peak spiritual experience through a perfect sexual union. In his later

³Ibid.

⁴Richard Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 129.

poems, Yeats often uses the sexual experience as a means of depicting spiritual experiences. Since traditionally Solomon is associated with wisdom, his appearance in this poem which concerns a sexual experience he has links wisdom with sexuality--the spirit with the flesh. Further linking the flesh with the spirit in this poem is the fact that Solomon and Sheba achieve spiritual union in and through their physical union. This poem reflects Yeats's radical departure from his early poetry where he assumed that spiritual fulfillment could be achieved only at the cost of mortifying the flesh. This poem, where spiritual fulfillment is seen to have been achieved in and through sense experience, reflects Yeats's emergence from a dualistic view of reality to a monistic one.

In this poem, Solomon constitutes the two aspects of reality in terms of "Choice" and "Chance." Since Solomon sees that the world is constituted by the strife of "Choice" and "Chance," then he sees his perfect sexual union with Sheba as entailing the end of the world and the reintroduction of eternity.

Ellmann notices that "Solomon and the Witch" is like Shadowy Waters insofar as, in both poems, the lovers seek or attain a "mystic marriage." According to Ellmann, in "Solomon and the Witch," the idea of the lovers' union as having ended the world is viewed as a witty conceit; whereas in the earlier poem, it is viewed as a real possibility.⁵ While it is true that the tone is light in this poem in comparison to the tone of Shadowy Waters, and Solomon doesn't think the reintroduction of eternity and the end of the world has literally occurred, "Solomon and the Witch" is, nevertheless, a poem as serious in its import as Shadowy Waters. Solomon's

⁵Ibid., p. 161.

comparison of their sexual union with the reintroduction of eternity and the end of the world is an appropriate and, therefore, fully serious one since, through their sexual union, the lovers have the highest experience of eternity possible to man. Solomon's use of the ending of the world as a metaphor does not imply a cavalier attitude toward the idea of "mystic marriage," but rather a new understanding of what constitutes a man's experience of eternity. While Forgael thought perfect love could be experienced only to the extent that the limits of the flesh were escaped, Solomon sees that perfect love occurs only by means of the flesh.

The witch referred to in the title is Sheba. She says she, "Cried out in a strange tongue / Not his, not mine" (ll. 5-6) last night as she lay on the grass in Solomon's arms. The "strange" cry is a symbol for their sexual union, and the rest of the poem is devoted to Solomon's interpretation of the cry. Solomon's authority is established by the Biblical tradition of his wisdom:

Who understood

Whatever has been said, sighed, sung,

Howled, miau-d, barked, brayed, belled,
yelled, cried, crowed.

(ll. 7-8)

While traditionally Solomon's wisdom has been associated with a more ratiocinative kind of thinking, here it is represented as penetrating into pre-rational consciousness, thus enabling him to interpret experiences outside the boundaries of ordinary reality.

Solomon identifies the strange cry as the crow of a nearby cockerel:

'A Cockerel

Crew from a blossoming apple bough

Three hundred years before the Fall,

And never crew again till now,
 And would not now but that he thought,
 Chance being at one with Choice at last
 All that the brigand apple brought
 And this foul world were dead at last.

(11. 9-16)

Although there is no established time period in the Bible for the interval between the Creation and the Fall, this seems to be the time period to which Solomon refers. Thus the cockerel first crowed at the creation of the world which, according to the esoteric knowledge of Solomon, occurred three hundred years before the Fall. Solomon says the second time the cockerel crowed was "last night" during their lovemaking. Solomon is saying that just as the cockerel crowed in the original edenic perfection of the world, he has now crowed in another state of perfection which has been initiated by their lovemaking.

But the next thing Solomon says qualifies (and reverses) the original interpretation of the crow which he has led us to make:

'He that crowed out eternity
 Thought to have crowed it in again.'

(11. 17-18)

Now it is clear that the cockerel was not crowing in the edenic world at the creation but that he was crowing out eternity. The implication is that the creation of the world, even before the Fall, meant the ushering out of the perfection of eternity. The cockerel's crowing from a "blossoming apple bough / Three hundred years before the Fall" (11. 10-11) reflects the fact that the seeds for the Fall (the blossoms for the "brigand apple") were implicit in the Creation. Corruption and

strife were part of the nature of the world at the time of the Creation-- Eve aside. Thus Solomon sees that conflict is an inextricable part of the world. Solomon modifies the Christian myth of Creation by implying that the creation of the world, not the Fall, entailed the perversion of eternity. Through his modification of the myth of Creation, Solomon reflects his understanding that man's mortal experience is constituted by strife.

Solomon says the second crow which occurred "last night" entails a reversal of the circumstances which the first crow announced: Last night the cockerel crowed eternity in, and he crowed the world out. Since the temporal world is characterized by strife and since their (his and Sheba's) sexual union was one of perfect harmony, then the cockerel's crowing "last night" signaled the end of the world and the reintroduction of eternity, that is, no such perfect experience could occur in the world; hence the world must have been destroyed. At this point Solomon seems to be espousing Forgael's view of spiritual love (see above, p. 11).

Now that he has shown the world to be constituted by the conflict of Choice and Chance, Solomon gives instances of this conflict in the love relationship:

For though love has a spider's eye
To find out some appropriate pain--
Aye, though all passion's in the glance--
For every nerve, and tests a lover
With cruelties of Choice and Chance;
And when at last that murder's over
Maybe the bride-bed brings despair,

For each an imagined image brings
And finds a real image there.

(11. 19-27)

The strife which constitutes a lover's world is created by the resistance of his real image (his lover) to his dream image (his dream lover). So just as eternity was ushered out with the creation of the world, the perfection of the lover's dream is ushered out with the introduction of the real love relationship.

Solomon uses the metaphor of the lighting of a lamp to reflect the meaning of the ending of the lover's world and the reintroduction of the lover's eternity:

'Yet the world ends when these two things
Though several, are a single light,
When oil and wick are burned in one.'

(11. 28-30)

Solomon's use of this metaphor suggests that the lovers' experience of union is different and more than the non-resistance of one lover to the other lover's dream. In the lighting of the lamp, oil is drawn up into the filament of the wick so that when the lamp is lit the "single light" which results depends on the two formerly separate entities becoming one through joining mutually in becoming something else. Sheba says her cry, which is a symbol for their union, is "Not his, not mine," because it represents an experience which involves both Solomon and herself.

Ellmann says the "mystic marriage" in "Solomon and the Witch" occurs when the lover's "imagined image" ("Choice") exactly corresponds to the real one ("Chance").⁶ Although Solomon's interpretation of the strife

⁶Ellmann, p. 161.

the lover experiences involves seeing that it is composed of the conflict between his dream and reality, he goes beyond this simplistic understanding of conflict and the implied view of eternity through his metaphorical description of the lovers' union. Their union is not composed simply of a lucky conformity of wills as he first implied. If a lucky conformity of wills were the source of the lovers' harmony, the harmony would be a very autistic ideal. But through his metaphorical description, Solomon suggests that in their experience of union the lovers transcend even the limits of their own dreams. He suggests that while conflict is the source of resistance and limitation to one's dreams, it is also the means of transcending the limits that even dreams impose. Thus the personae of Yeats's later poems are not forced to choose between uninvolved vision and blind action as are the personae of Yeats's early poems, since they see that spiritual experiences are achieved in and through engagement with the world.

Since Solomon has seen his union with Sheba to have been an experience of eternity he says:

'Therefore a blessed moon last night
Gave Sheba to her Solomon.'

(II. 31-32)

According to the OED, the etymological meaning of "bless" is, "to mark (or affect in some way) with blood (or sacrifice); to consecrate." The etymological meaning of "bless" seems appropriate here since the lovers' union was made possible in and through the blood, that is, through physicality. Sheba objects to Solomon's statement that the world has ended; she notices, "'Yet the world stays!'" Solomon then admits the indisputable fact that the world has not ended. He says the cockerel

must have been mistaken, although he found their experience "'worth a crow'" (l. 35). By way of explanation for the cockerel's mistake he says, "'Maybe an image is too strong / Or maybe is not strong enough'" (ll. 36-37). But Solomon has known all along, of course, that the world has not ended: He now calls the cockerel "'your cockerel.'" His explanation that an image must have been too strong or too weak is ironic since man must, because of the nature of his consciousness, perceive what he perceives via images. In A Vision, Yeats says that man's highest experiences must still remain but images of eternity: "Even the sphere formed by concord is not the changeless eternity, for concord or love but offers us the image of that which is changeless."⁷ While Sheba's experience of eternity was genuine, it was not eternity in and of itself. The cockerel that crowed during their union was not the cockerel that announces transitions of the world and eternity, but he is Sheba's cockerel ("'your cockerel'") who announces transitions in Sheba's experience of the temporal and the eternal.

Sheba now refers to the place where they lay "'last night'" as the "'forbidden sacred grove'" (l. 39). That the setting for their sexual experience is the forbidden grove section of the garden of Eden reflects two things about the experience. First, it reflects the impossibility for man absolutely to transcend the world and experience eternity (this would entail the literal ending of the world); and second, it reflects the relative perfection of the lovers' union (Eden before the Fall represents the highest state of perfection which has characterized the world). The cheerfulness with which Solomon accepts the "failure" of

⁷W. B. Yeats, A Vision (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), pp. 67-68.

their union to end the world is not due to his lack of seriousness but rather to his understanding of the limits to, as well as the possibilities for, a man's spiritual fulfillment. Solomon has seen that man's experience of conflict is both the source of his spiritual vision as well as the source of the limits to this vision. Although a man can never permanently live at the level of eternity while still in the flesh, it is through the flesh that he achieves his momentary glimpses into eternity. Since Solomon sees spiritual experiences as achieved in and through sensual experiences, the view of reality expressed by this poem is monistic. The flesh and the spirit are but two aspects of the same reality. Man's experience of conflict between the two is an expression of his limitation in perception rather than of their essential distinctness. Hence Solomon would never try to achieve spiritual love by denying physical love as does Forgael in Shadowy Waters.

In "Vacillation" (1932) the persona's understanding of man's nature and potential for spiritual fulfillment is but a more complex and general expression of Solomon's understanding. Since the persona of "Vacillation" sets the dualistic view of man's nature in opposition to his own monistic view (which reflects the view expressed by all Yeats's later poems), the sense in which the later view of man's nature is a transformation, rather than a development, of Yeats's earlier view is made clear.

The persona proceeds through the description of an attempt to achieve spiritual fulfillment through the denial of the flesh to a description of an actual spiritual experience which occurs in and through acceptance of the flesh. Part I depicts generally what being involved in the physical world means for a man. In this section the persona says a man's mortal experience is constituted by:

All those antinomies
Of day and night.

(I. 5-6)

The view that man's mortal experience is constituted by conflict is also the insight upon which Yeats says the system of A Vision (and, he might have added, all his later poetry) is founded:

The whole system is founded upon the belief that the ultimate reality, symbolized as the Sphere, falls in human consciousness, as Nicholas of Cusa was the first to demonstrate, into a series of antinomies.⁸

Yeats says here that the strife which man experiences in the world is due to the structure of human consciousness. Yeats's insight that man's experience of conflict is due to the structure of his consciousness rather than to the warring of two distinct natures within his breast is the new insight which is responsible for his radical departure from the dualistic view implied by his early poems.

The persona suggests that there is a way to transcend the experience of conflict, to transcend mortality:

The body calls it death,
The heart remorse.

(I. 5-6)

A man may become oblivious to the antinomies of mortal experience either through remorse, which involves oblivion to the present, or through physical death. Part I ends with a question and an implicit suggestion that there may be another, more positive, way to transcend the antinomies of experience:

⁸W. B. Yeats, A Vision, p. 187.

But if these be right

What is joy?

(I. 9-10)

Joy too seems to be an experience which transcends conflict, but if joy involves a heightened awareness of experience rather than oblivion to experience (as does remorse or death), and if all mortal experience involves conflict, how, then, can one transcend conflict and still remain conscious? That is, how is spiritual fulfillment (joy) possible for mortal man? Whereas in Yeats's early poems the personae see involvement in the world and spiritual and aesthetic vision to be mutually exclusive, the question, the persona of this poem poses at the end of Part I concerns the possibility of both being involved in the world and also experiencing visions which transcend the ordinary limits of mortal experience.

The answer to this question implied by Part II (it reflects the way the personae of Yeats's early poems achieve spiritual and aesthetic vision) is negated by the answer implied by Parts III, IV, and V (taken together they represent the way the personae of Yeats's later poems achieve spiritual and aesthetic vision). The remaining parts of the poem relate the nature of joy to the nature of art.

Joy is one way that the personae of the later poems describe their spiritual and aesthetic experiences; they also call them "happiness," being "blessed," and the union of "Choice and Chance." While the personae of the early poems see their spiritual and aesthetic experiences in relatively permanent terms (they call it eternal love, beauty, or truth), the personae of the later poems see theirs as relatively momentary occurrences.

In Part II the persona describes an attempt to escape time and experience union with the realm of pure spirit through mortification of the flesh. A tree that "Is half all glittering flame and half all green / Abounding foliage moistened with the dew" (II. 12-13) represents the antinomies of flesh and spirit in this section. The person who is presented as trying to escape the antinomies and achieve union with spirit is a devotee of Attis. The worship of Attis is a tradition which came from Asia Minor.⁹ Attis was a vegetation god who castrated himself when Cybele, the earth mother, drove him to frenzy. Attis's devotees held a festival in March of each year when they hung his image on a sacred tree and castrated themselves in his honor. When the devotees hung Attis's image between the two sides of the sacred tree and castrated themselves, they gave up their possibilities for ordinary mortal experience and hoped thereby to become one with the god.

The burning tree, on which the Attis devotee is depicted as hanging his god's image, comes from the Welsh mythic tradition. Yeats found the burning tree in the Mabinogian. He quotes from a passage in the Mabinogian on the burning tree:

'They saw a tall tree by the side of the river, one half of which was in flames from the root to the top and the other half was green and in full leaf.'¹⁰

The tree is symbolic of the physical and spiritual aspects of life in the Mabinogian, and it has a similar symbolic meaning in Part II of "Vacillation." The second reference to the tree's two aspects in Part II makes their representation of flesh and spirit more explicit than does this

⁹Ellmann, pp. 171-172. I follow throughout Ellmann's discussion of the tradition of Attis worship.

¹⁰Yeats, "The Celtic Element in Literature," Essays, p. 217.

allusion to the Mabinogian: "That staring fury and the blind lush leaf" (II. 17). The "blind lush leaf" suggests the unselfconscious vitality of a totally involved life while the "staring fury" suggests the estrangement of a spiritual one. The fact that the Attis devotee hangs Attis's image "between" the two aspects of the tree implies that he seeks spiritual vision through dividing his flesh from his spirit. He tries to achieve this by castrating himself as did Attis before him.

The persona sees the Attis devotee's path to joy as resulting in failure. By fleeing experience, the Attis devotee will not gain the spiritual knowledge Attis represents (the Attis devotee "may know not what he [Attis] knows"), although he will successfully escape the suffering which experience entails (the Attis devotee "knows not grief"). The persona says that the Attis devotee is able to rule out the suffering which human experience entails through disengaging himself from it, but that he is not able to achieve the positive state of spiritual union which he seeks. The persona characterizes the Attis devotee's achievement in terms of what it is not--"he knows not grief"--because the Attis devotee is able to get outside of the antinomies of human experience only through the path of oblivion rather than through joy. The "staring fury" defies mortal man. The Attis devotee and the personae of the early poetry have quested after an impossible, because inherently contradictory, ideal. The Attis devotee can be seen as a pagan variety of the Christian saint since he sacrifices the desires of his flesh to emulate his god. In his later poems, Yeats often characterizes the path the personae of his early poems take as the path of the saint or the soul. In his later poems Yeats views this path as leading toward death and spiritual impoverishment rather than toward spiritual and aesthetic vision as he once thought.

In Part III the persona exhorts the reader to:

Get all the gold and silver that you can,
Satisfy ambition, animate
The trivial days and ram them with the sun.

(III. 19-21)

But the persona's exhortation to satisfy worldly ambition turns out to be ironic since his following statement implies that it is inherently impossible to satisfy even the most ordinary of ambitions. The persona says one must be idle to get all a woman's love, yet to get one's children's gratitude he must be very industrious: "All women dote upon an idle man / Although their children need a rich estate" (III. 23-24). Furthermore, the persona implies that to whatever extent one is able to "satisfy ambition," the days in which one does so are "trivial days." He characterizes the man who pursues ordinary ambitions as caught in "Lethean foliage" (III. 27). "Lethean foliage" clearly refers to the "blind lush leaf," to the aspect of the burning tree which represents flesh. Through the association of the "blind lush leaf" with the pursuit of ordinary ambitions, the pursuit of ordinary ambitions is seen to entail blindness to the spirit. While the Attis devotee does not achieve his goal of spiritual knowledge through his rejection of the flesh, the ordinary man does not satisfy his worldly ambitions through his rejection of the spirit. The implication at this point in the poem is that there is neither satisfaction in the world nor satisfaction out of it (for man). This negative view of man's possibility for experiencing fulfillment is essentially the view of reality at which Oisín arrived.

But in the second stanza of Part III, the persona suggests that there is another approach to reality besides the blind involvement in the

world which characterizes the ordinary man's pursuit of ambition, and the uninvolvedness which characterizes the Attis devotee's quest for spirit. The persona suggests that man's possibilities do not lie between choosing for either the flesh or the spirit, he sees that there is a way of being in the world which differs from the blindness of the ordinary man and the estrangement of the saint. The persona sees that the way to remain involved in the world while also attaining vision is to live one's life while maintaining an awareness of his death:

And from the fortieth winter by that thought
 Test every work of intellect or faith,
 And everything that your own hands have wrought,
 And call those works extravagance of breath
 That are not suited for such men as come
 Proud, open-eyed and laughing to the tomb.

(III. 29-34)

It is possible to include the antinomies of vision and action in one's life through the right approach to his experiences. The right approach involves walking "Proud, open-eyed and laughing to the tomb." Laughter, pride and open-eyedness imply a selfconscious, accepting approach to experience. They imply that while one feels pride in his part in the world, in his identity, he also realizes that his part will end, he will die. By maintaining an awareness of his own death while yet involved in life, a man can confront the particulars of his own existence with some degree of detachment. He can then approach life with gaiety, with laughter, rather than with the blind and narrow seriousness which the total preoccupation with worldly affairs brings. The way the persona characterizes this ideal life, as "Proud, open-eyed and laughing," indicates

that this life includes the antinomies of vision and action. Thus the persona does not see a man as being forced to choose between blind involvement and uninvolved vision as do the personae of the early poems; and he is beginning to suggest a way of life which leads out of the dualistic view of man which is implied by the early poems.

In Parts IV and V, the persona places his own life in the context of the ideal life of which he has been speaking. He says he is in his "fiftieth year." Since the persona has exhorted the reader to begin integrating the awareness of his death into his life from his fortieth year, presumably the persona has himself been practicing this method of living for at least ten years. He depicts himself in the mundane setting of a London shop:

I sat, a solitary man,
In a crowded London shop,
An open book and empty cup
On the marble table-top.

(IV. 35-39)

His being alone and yet among a crowd of people suggests that he is neither unselfconsciously carried forward by the events of the world as is the man who espouses the path of ordinary ambition, nor is he disengaged from the world as is the saint.

In the second stanza of Part IV, the persona says he experiences joy while still in this relatively mundane setting:

While on the shop and street I gazed
My body of a sudden blazed;
And twenty minutes more or less

It seemed, so great my happiness,
That I was blessed and could bless.

(IV. 40-44)

The persona's use of the motif, "blazed," to describe his experience of happiness relates the experience to his description of the destruction of the world in Part I where a similar motif is used:

A brand, or flaming breath,
Comes to destroy
All those antinomies
Of day and night.

(I. 3-6)

The persona's use of the motif, "blazed," to describe his happiness also relates the experience to the spiritual aspect of the burning tree, in Part II, which is "half all glittering flame." Since the persona's experience of happiness is associated with spirit and with the end of the world, the implication is that it is a spiritual experience which transcends conflict and limitation. His description of his happiness is the persona's answer to the question posed in Part I about the nature of joy. While the spiritual experience attempted by the saint depends upon his denial of the flesh, the spiritual experience achieved by the persona depends upon his acceptance of the flesh: He says his "body [*italics mine*] blazed." Also reflecting the union of the physical and the spiritual aspects in his experience of joy is the persona's use of the word "blessed" to describe it. As noted earlier, the etymological meaning of "bless" is to make sacred by means of the blood. It is by means of the blood, by means of his body, that the persona is able to reconcile the antinomies and to experience joy. Joy is like physical or emotional

death in that it involves ending man's experience of conflict, but joy is an experience of heightened awareness rather than of dulled awareness. The Attis devotee's attempt to achieve joy through denying the flesh not only fails to yield any positive results, but also estranges him from the world. The persona, on the other hand, has a genuine spiritual experience because he accepts the flesh. The persona's experience of joy together with the Attis devotee's failure to experience it indicate that only through accepting the antinomies of mortal experience may one transcend them. Hence the persona expresses the same monistic view of reality as Solomon in the poem examined previously. It is through accepting the plenitude of experience, not through its denial, that one achieves spiritual and aesthetic vision.

The persona says that the experience of joy lasted "twenty minutes more or less / It seemed" (IV. 42-43). The persona takes a similar view to Solomon's in that he does not view the ephemerality of his happiness negatively. Rather he seems amazed that it at least "seemed" that long. The persona does not expect permanently to transcend the antinomies of his experience and permanently to experience eternity or joy as do the personae of the early poems (Fergus irrevocably severs his ties with time and Forgael sails away to spiritual love as if it were a place). Ephemerality has characterized the persona's experience of joy as well as Solomon and Sheba's experience of perfect sexual harmony.

Ellmann quotes from some notes Yeats made to A Vision in 1928. In these notes, Yeats talks about the reason for the momentary nature of man's experiences and the relationship of these experiences to art:

'At first we are subject to Destiny. . .but the point in the Zodiac where the whirl becomes a sphere once reached, we may escape from the constraint of our nature and from that of

external things, entering upon a state where all fuel has become flame, where there is nothing but the state itself, nothing to constrain it or end it. We attain it always in the creation or enjoyment of a work of art, but that moment though eternal in the Daimon passes from us because it is not an attainment of our whole being.¹¹

Yeats says that a man may transcend the boundaries of his own consciousness (the "constraint" of his "nature") as well as the boundaries of his environment ("external things"), but he cannot permanently live at this level because it is not a complete expression of his being. While in this state, a man transcends the experience of his past, but since the state cannot represent a transcendence of his future experiences, it is not complete. A man's spiritual and aesthetic vision must come to an end because there are still more new realities for him to encounter. By the same token, there are also more new possibilities for spiritual and aesthetic vision. While Yeats sees art as one means of attaining spiritual and aesthetic vision, he implies in the statement quoted above that it is not the only means of doing so. The persona's experience of joy, and Solomon and Sheba's experience of perfect sexual harmony are examples of spiritual and aesthetic experiences which occur outside the realm of art.

Part V also deals with the persona's personal experience. He calls the experience "responsibility" and juxtaposes it to his experience of joy described in Part IV. "Responsibility" or remorse entails embarrassment and guilt about recalled past actions. The persona says that remorse about his past actions makes him impervious to present realities. He describes two antinomies in nature to which his responsibility makes him oblivious: The day, sun and summer; and the night, moon, and winter.

¹¹Ellmann, p. 221.

Responsibility entails a man's oblivion to his experience of the antinomies; whereas, joy entails his heightened awareness and reconciliation of the antinomies. The fact that this description of the negative experience of remorse immediately follows the description of joy reflects the persona's understanding that suffering and conflict are inescapable. Since his approach to the world involves the acceptance of his experiences rather than their denial, and since human experience involves pain and suffering as well as joy and fulfillment, then he must accept the conflict and suffering which is his lot as well as the joy. The remaining sections of the poem are devoted to relating art to joy and to the life which is based on accepting the antinomies of human experience.

Forgael and the other personae of Yeats's early poems thought that since mortal experience entails spiritual blindness and suffering, it must be escaped. The personae of Yeats's later poems also see that mortal experience is fraught with suffering and limitation, but, unlike the personae of Yeats's early poems, they see that mortal experience is also the source of spiritual and aesthetic vision. In a later poem, "A Dialogue of Self and Soul," the persona sees that the vicissitudes of life--its "ditches"--are for all the suffering they cause a source of spiritual fecundity. In another of Yeats's later poems, "The Circus Animals' Desertion," the persona says "all the ladders start, / In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart" (III. 39-40). Thus the affirmation of mortal experience expressed by the personae of Yeats's later poems, entails an affirmation of spiritual and aesthetic vision to which mortal experience is seen to give rise.

The three stanzas of Part VI all end with the refrain: "Let all things pass away." Standing on a mountain and overlooking the valley,

the lord of Chou feels the signs of spring (he smells the new mown hay and sees the riverly field), casts off the signs of winter (the mountain snow), and cries, "'Let all things pass away'" (VI. 61). The lord of Chou wills the passing of winter because he understands that its passing is necessary to the approach of spring. That he wills "all" things to pass rather than just winter, reflects his awareness that the introduction of all new experiences depends upon the passing away of old experiences. The lord of Chou's acceptance and affirmation of destruction arises from his joy in creation.

In the second stanza of Part VI, another way of affirming change is described:

Where Babylon or Nineveh
Rose; some conqueror drew rein
And cried to battle-weary men,
'Let all things pass away.'

(VI. 63-66)

The conqueror is the lord of Chou's counterpart. Whereas the lord of Chou affirms change due to his joy in the manifestation of new realities which change makes possible, the conqueror affirms change due to his dissatisfaction with all that has been created. The two taken together express the antinomious attitudes of joy in creation and the urge to destruction. Since both creation and destruction are part of the world, they are both attitudes appropriate to mortal man.

The understanding of the world implied by these stanzas parallels the understanding of time expressed by A Vision. Yeats saw that all temporal realities must pass away so that new realities might supplant them. A millennium exhausts itself in time just as do the seasons:

A millennium is the symbolic measure of a being that attains its flexible maturity and then sinks into rigid age.¹²

Since change is but the passing away of realities that have exhausted themselves and the introduction of new ones, change makes it possible to obtain a more inclusive apprehension of reality. Hence, if a man is to grow wise as he grows older he must never rest satisfied with present realities; he must affirm change as does the conqueror. If a man chooses the path of wisdom he will also affirm change because he rejoices in new created things, as does the lord of Chou. "Wisdom," which was the original title for "Vacillation," would have been an equally appropriate title for this poem because vacillation or change is the means by which man obtains a more inclusive grasp of reality. It is the means by which he attains wisdom whereas Oisín, in Wanderings, sees mutability as the cause of all man's suffering and it is the reason he leaves the world to search for happiness on the islands; the persona of "Vacillation" sees mutability as integral to man's happiness. Integral to the monistic view of reality reflected by the personae of Yeats's later poems is this understanding that it is through a man's experience of the world that he fulfills himself spiritually.

The third stanza in Part VI, unlike the first two stanzas, is spoken by the persona. In this stanza the persona refers to the burning tree once again, but in this instance he constitutes its two aspects differently: They are "those branches of the night and day" (VI. 68). Thus this stanza links the burning tree, whose two aspects have come to represent the antinomies of flesh and spirit, to the "antinomies / Of day and night" (I. 5-6) which represent man's experience of conflict in the world.

¹²A Vision, p. 268.

Hence the tree now represents the nature of mortal experience, and it is said to have its roots in "man's blood-sodden heart" (VI. 67). Thus man's experience of conflict and opposition in the world is seen to be an expression of his mortality. This explains why the saint depicted in Part II achieved no positive spiritual experience when he tried to escape the antinomies of flesh and spirit: While one may become oblivious to the antinomies of experience through denying his body (all experience is ultimately founded on the senses and thus on the body), he may not choose to perceive reality any other way. Since the experience of conflict is simply a result of the means through which a man perceives reality, choosing to escape conflict entails choosing to escape and deny reality. Thus the appropriate attitude for the Attis devotee who wishes to achieve spiritual vision would be for him to accept the opposition between flesh and spirit which he experienced rather than to attempt to escape it. In A Vision Yeats says man's experience of antinomies is an illusion necessary to human perception:

The ultimate reality, because neither one nor many, concord nor discord, is symbolized as a phaseless sphere, but as all things fall into a series of antinomies in human experience. . . . All things are present in an eternal instant to our Daimon . . . but that instant is of necessity unintelligible to all bound to the antinomies.¹³

A "gaudy moon" is hung upon the burning tree described in Part IV just as Attis's image was hung upon the tree, described in Part II. The saint's placing the image of his god upon the tree represents his attempts to transcend the antinomies and achieve union with the realm of spirit. Since the moon replaces Attis's image on the burning tree described in VI, the implication is that the moon, too, represents an

¹³A Vision, p. 193.

attempt to transcend the antinomies of experience. The moon represents the persona's goal of joy just as Attis's image represents the saint's goal of spiritual union. The moon's position on the tree described in Part VI is somewhat different from the position of Attis's image on the tree described in Part II in that the moon does not hang "between" the two aspects of the burning tree as does Attis's image. This difference in position reflects the fact that the persona accepts the antinomies of experience rather than denies them. He does not seek joy through denying the flesh as does the Attis devotee, so the joy that he seeks and achieves is a total expression of his being.

It is a "gaudy" moon which is hung upon the tree. "Gaudy," according to the OED, has an earlier meaning than its current one, "brilliant but excessively showy." Earlier it meant "a festival, a day for rejoicing." The earlier meaning of "gaudy" is appropriate here since the moon represents the experience of joy and reconciliation of the antinomies. But the current meaning of "gaudy" is also appropriate here since joy, too, is seen to be an ephemeral experience. Although the experience of joy is complete in itself, since it is not a complete expression of eternity it, too, must pass away to make possible the introduction of new realities, and new experiences of joy.

The persona asks: "'What is the meaning of all song?'" (VI. 70). This question echoes the first question posed in Part I about the meaning of joy. Since the question about song comes immediately after the persona's new description of the burning tree with the moon hung upon it, song is associated with joy and with the transcendence of the antinomies. (As noted earlier, Yeats sees that art is one way of experiencing eternity). The persona answers his own question about song with the refrain,

"Let all things pass away" (VI. 71). The persona's question and answer about the nature of song can be interpreted in two ways, and both apply to the context of the poem. One interpretation of the persona's answer, "Let all things pass away," is that the implied meaning of all song is to affirm change and rejoice in all creation. This is simply the meaning which the refrain brings with it from its occurrences in the two previous stanzas. The second way in which the persona's use of the refrain to answer his question about song may be interpreted is that all song itself must pass away. The persona sees that song not only affirms the passing away of all experiences, but also it affirms its own passing away. Song, just as joy with which it is associated, exhausts itself and therefore must pass away to make way for new songs and new expressions of reality. Just as the persona's experience of joy is bound by the laws of change so, too, is art. Man's transcendence of the antinomies can never be permanent. When the persona says that all song must pass away, it is not clear whether he means just that the aesthetic experience of the appreciator and of the artist while creating the art work must pass away or whether he also means that the art work as artifact must pass away--that the art work itself will cease to have an audience. Since the persona of "Sailing to Byzantium" implies that the art work itself is eternal, it is possible that the persona of "Vacillation" is not referring to the art work qua art work as being subject to the laws of time here, but only to the individual experiences of it.

The parts in an earlier version of "Vacillation" were individually titled. Part VI was entitled "Conquerors." "Conquerors" is obviously appropriate to the first two stanzas of VI since they respectively reflect the viewpoint of the lord of Chou and of "some conqueror," but

this title is just as appropriate, although less obviously so, to the third stanza, which is spoken from the persona's own perspective. The third stanza is about joy and song in relation to the antinomies of experience. Joy and song are conquerors of time in that they are glimpses into the eternal nature of things. But the refrain at the end of the third stanza reverses their conqueror relationship to time. Mutability is seen to be the ultimate conqueror since joy and song are subject to its law: "Let all things pass away." Thus Part VI ends in full affirmation of mutability: The personae affirms even the passing away of this, his own song.

Part VII consists of a debate between the Heart and the Soul. This dialogue between the Heart and the Soul recapitulates the dialectic between the saint and the persona running through the poem. The Soul objects to mutability and counsels the Heart to seek the eternal and leave the appearances of the world: "Seek out reality, leave things that seem" (VII. 72). But the Heart says that since it is his nature to be a singer, if he were to reject the appearances of the world he would have nothing to sing about: "What, be a singer born and lack a theme?" (VII. 73). The Soul now puts his argument in Christian terms: "Isiah's coal, what more can man desire?" (VII. 74). (When the angel touched Isiah's lips with a coal he was purged of his individual desires, and his will became one with God's will.) But the Heart objects to oneness with the will of God because he sees he will thereby be purged of his identity and will be severed from his connection with the world: "Struck dumb in the simplicity of fire" (VII. 75). The Soul responds that salvation depends upon the purgation of individual desires: "Look on that fire, salvation walks within" (VII. 76). But the Heart, still continuing with the

requirements of song, which are also the requirements of his nature, says that Homer had to write about the disobedience of man to God: "What theme had Homer but original sin?" (VII. 77). The Soul assumes that mutability and the relative inferiority of the temporal standpoint, as compared with the standpoint of the eternal, are sufficient reason to reject mortal experience; he reinforces this assumption with the Christian concept of salvation and damnation. But the Heart understands that the rejection of mutability does not lead to anything positive because it is an expression of man's very nature, it is the way he must perceive reality.

The expression of the two opposing positions in this dialogue in terms of the Heart and Soul rather than in terms of the saint and the singer or poet indicates the view expressed by the Heart is spoken as a man as well as a poet. The Heart objects to the Soul's path on the basis that it would deny the requirements of his nature as a man and as a singer. Joy and song, the poet and the ideal man, are always compatible in Yeats's poems and often they are one and the same. Since Yeats sees that the aesthetic experience is an experience in which man transcends time, it (the aesthetic experience) is the same kind of experience as the one which Solomon and Sheba have during their lovemaking, and one the persona has in the London shop. Too often, Yeats's critics have misunderstood the compatibility of the poet with the ideal man, and the comparability of the aesthetic experience with the experience of joy in Yeats's poetry and have said that, for Yeats, the pursuit of the highest experiences is the pursuit of art.¹⁴

¹⁴In The Whole Mystery of Art (New York: Macmillan Company, 1961), p. 285, Giorgio Melchiori says "Ultimately then, 'Unity of Being' is just the artistic creation, and his [Yeats's] pursuit of such unity is the pursuit of art."

In Part VIII the persona again speaks in his own person except this time it is primarily as a poet rather than as a man. The persona debates Von Hugel, the seventeenth century saint, mystic, and theologian, except the persona substitutes himself for Von Hugel, who is in absentia. The persona begins by enumerating the similarities between himself and Von Hugel: They both believe in miracles and "honour sanctity." The persona implies their differences, though, as he enumerates their similarities. He says that he, like Von Hugel, believes the body of Saint Teresa lies undecayed in the tomb, but he carries his belief in miracles to what Von Hugel would view as heresy. The persona says he believes:

Those self-same hands perchance
Eternalized the body of a modern saint that once
Had scooped out Pharaoh's mummy.

(VIII. 82-84)

The persona says the same power ("Those self-same hands") that preserved Saint Teresa's mummy also preserved Pharaoh's mummy. He implies that he sees the workings of the supernatural in all religions, all cults, all countries; whereas Von Hugel would see its workings only in the context of Christianity. As reflected by aesthetic experience in the London shop, the personae also finds the supernatural in everyday surroundings, it does not lie in a realm apart from the ordinary as it does for Von Hugel.

The persona says that he sees he could derive a certain comfort in the beliefs of Christianity, that his fear of death might be allayed by the doctrines of Christianity:

--though
heart might find relief
Did I become a Christian man and choose for my
belief

What seems most welcome in the tomb. . . .

(VIII. 84-86)

The doctrines of Christianity are what seems best in the tomb, they are doctrines for death, not life, and the persona's primary emphasis is on the conflict of these doctrines with the needs of a poet: "I . . . play a predestined part. / Homer is my example and his unchristened heart" (VIII. 84-87). The persona further explains his rejection of Von Hugel and Christianity through an allusion to a riddle posed in the Bible. He says: "The lion and the honeycomb, what has the scripture said?" (VIII. 88). The riddle to which the persona alludes is from Judges 14.5: "Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet." The import of this allusion is a restatement of the import of the poem: For those who can maintain a "Proud, open-eyed and laughing" attitude toward the antinomies of experience (the "strong") come forth the experiences of joy and song (the "sweet"). It is in and through the acceptance of the conflict which characterizes mortal experience that one achieves the experiences of their reconciliation (joy and song).

The persona says that he and Von Hugel must part after all for their differences are more profound than their similarities: "So get you gone Von Hugel, though with blessings on your head" (VIII. 89). Ellmann says the persona's benediction "bows politely to orthodoxy in Von Hugel."¹⁵ But far from being a polite bow, the persona's blessing is an ironic summation of their differences since "blessing" for the persona means a spiritual experience achieved in and through the body; whereas "blessing" has a very different meaning for Von Hugel. With his blessing, the persona would endow Von Hugel with spiritual experiences which arise from

¹⁵Ellmann, p. 274.

the acceptance and affirmation of worldly experience--of mutability--rather than from his estrangement from the world. Thus the blessings which the persona would administer to Von Hugel's head are of a very different sort than the blessings Von Hugel himself would administer.

The persona rejects the Attis devotee's path, and Von Hugel's path; and the Heart rejects the Soul's path, because the paths of Von Hugel, the Attis devotee, and the Soul all involve seeking to attain spiritual vision through disengaging themselves from their possibilities for experience in the world: These paths all assume a dualistic view of reality. Their denial of one aspect of experience takes the form of the denial of the body for the Attis devotee, the form of the denial of individual desires and identity for the soul, and the form of narrow orthodoxy for Von Hugel. The persona's examination of these approaches to experience in this poem is an example of the way he says the ideal man should conduct his life. He tests "every work of intellect or faith" and calls "those works extravagance of breath" that are not suited for "such men as come / Proud, open-eyed and laughing to the tomb."

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

As seen through examining selected examples of his poems from early to late, Yeats evolved from seeing man's nature in dualistic terms to seeing man's nature in monistic terms. While Yeats moves in his poems from seeing man as composed of two separate and distinct natures (the spirit and the flesh) to seeing that both aspects of his nature are expressions of the same fundamental reality, he always sees that man's experience of the world is constituted by conflict. In his early poems, it is man's dual nature which is deemed responsible for the conflict he experiences in the world. The personae of Yeats's early poems see that they must choose between their two natures if they are to fulfill either of them. Since Yeats's personae are oriented toward achieving spiritual and aesthetic vision, they see that they must disengage themselves from the demands of the flesh because it wars with and undermines spirit. Thus the personae of Yeats's early poems are always denying one aspect of their being in their attempt to fulfill the other. Hence they are perpetually dissatisfied. They reject any potential for happiness which engagement with the world might bring, and yet they are either unsuccessful in achieving their quest for spiritual and aesthetic vision or in being satisfied with it. Significantly, most of the personae of Yeats's early poems are described as they quest for beauty and truth rather than as they achieve it.

As reflected by his later poems, Yeats comes to see man's experience of conflict and mutability as an expression of the way he must perceive reality rather than as evidence for his having a dual nature. He says: ". . . the ultimate reality, symbolized as the sphere, falls in human consciousness . . . into a series of antinomies." Since man cannot perceive reality all at once; he must proceed by contraries. This insight leads Yeats to an affirmation of all aspects of human experience since he now sees that man's experiences of mutability, conflict and suffering in the world are part of the means by which he perceives reality. Hence they are not to be denied or escaped. The personae of Yeats's later poems see that they gain wisdom and even momentary glimpses of eternity (often called joy in Yeats's later poems) through the acceptance of all aspects of their experiences and themselves. Yeats comes to see that the dissatisfaction and unfulfillment which characterizes the personae of his early poems is due to their having denied their possibilities for experience in their quest for spiritual and aesthetic vision when (Yeats now sees) man's experience of the world is his only access to beauty and truth.

Thus Yeats's movement from a dualistic interpretation of reality in his early poems to a monistic one in his later poems leads his personae out of perpetual dissatisfaction and self-negation to experiences of fulfillment and self-affirmation.

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